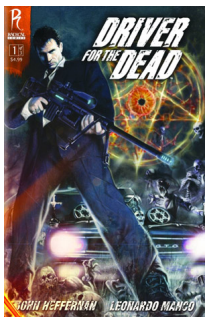
If you judge this book by its cover, DRIVER FOR THE DEAD #1, published by Radical Comics, seems like just another surfer on the neverending wave of zombie titles. But those nasty flesh-munchers are just a fraction of the ghouls, ghosts, gremlins, creatures, incantations and crones on display in this balls-to-the-wall action/horror effort.



The book opens in Louisiana, where we’re introduced to Moses Freeman, a calm and collected elderly gentleman (bearing a suspiciously spot-on resemblance to Morgan Freeman) who we quickly learn is a voodoo priest, about to perform a very complex exorcism on a young boy. Freeman doesn’t survive the ordeal, which provides a segue to the introduction of our hero, Alabaster Graves, a professional hearse driver who specializes in delivering both the dead and the undead to their final resting place via his souped-up hearse, lovingly named “Black Betty.” Graves’ latest job is to deliver Freeman’s corpse to the family crypt; however, the carcass isn’t his only passenger. Chosen for this assignment because numerous creatures of the night are determined to possess the magical remains, Graves must also deal with Freeman’s great-granddaughter, Marissa, who insists on accompanying her relative during his final journey. The most vicious of the monstrosities pursuing his cargo is Fallow, a creature with the ability to absorb another’s supernatural powers.

This book’s formula is not unlike that of your typical action film: numerous over-the-top, highly energized setpieces with short, plot-progressing dialogue scenes sprinkled throughout. After I did some minor research, I discovered this series’ writer, John Heffernan, was the original writer behind SNAKES ON A PLANE. I wouldn’t be surprised to find that the potential for this comic to become a Hollywood blockbuster script had been in the back of Heffernan’s mind since day one. All the elements are here: the troubled hero, a girl who wants nothing to do with him at first but begins to change her mind as the plot unfolds, a super-bad-ass vehicle and, to top it off, a nice little role for Academy Award winner Freeman! But the breath of fresh air that lifts this one

above uninspired mass-market fare is its hardcore horror aspects.

Argentinean illustrator Leonardo Manco is no stranger to the world of fright comics; there are echoes here of his previous work on HELLSTORM, WEREWOLF BY NIGHT and HELLBLAZER (particularly the latter, as the main character reminds a bit too much of John Constantine). However, his creature-and-carnage pencils don’t leave much to be desired for fear fans: Corroded zombies, stylish vampires, a very Lovecraftian snake creature and a biker gang of demons are complemented by decapitations, impalements, plucked-out eyeballs, and one damn impressive melting face. What else could you ask for? I’m not a huge fan of painted comics, which are becoming more and more popular these days, but this one wasn’t as distracting as usual. Kinsun Loh and Jerry Choo’s colors aren’t any better or worse than others’, so it must be the fast-paced action and dripping horrors that render the images easier on the eyes. It would still be interesting, though, to see how this one would have come off if colored in a more traditional manner.

If you’re looking for a fun ride, look no further. DRIVER FOR THE DEAD #1 literally puts the pedal to the metal, plows through anyone (or anything) in its way and never looks back. It’s nothing you’re going to remember a few years from now, but it sure is entertaining as hell while it lasts. This is the first of three issues, but at 45 pages, it almost feels like you’re getting two, which explains the hefty $4.99 cover price.

{jcomments on}